

My Schools and Scholars. No. IV

Samuel Storrs Howe

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Came the Delawares and Mohawks,
 Came the Choctaws and Camanches,
 Came the Shoshonees and Blackfeet,
 Came the Pawnees and Omahas,
 Came the Mandans and Dacotahs,
 Came the Hurons and Ojibways,
 All the warriors drawn together
 By the signal of the Peace-Pipe,
 To the mountains of the prairie,
 To the great Red Pipestone Quarry."

MY SCHOOLS AND SCHOLARS. No. IV.

PHILIP SPENCER'S TRAGIC DEATH AT THE YARD-ARM OF THE U. S. BRIG "SOMERS," BY ORDER OF U.S. NAVY CAPT. S. MACKENZIE.

PHILIP SPENCER was the youngest of three brothers, sons of John C. Spencer, born in Canandaigua, N. Y., in 1823. Indeed, he was the youngest child, and petted by his mother and by the family, who removed at length to Albany, N. Y.; and, under the administration of President Tyler, J. C. Spencer, resided as Secretary of War, at Washington, D. C. While there, the awful tragedy of the hanging at sea of Philip Spencer, "a youth of nineteen," who was hung at the yard-arm of the United States' brig "Somers," transpired! It was done—trial and hanging—before dinner, by order of Captain Seidell Mackenzie, on Saturday, the 26th of November, A. D. 1842; and then all hands were piped down to their mid-day meal! Little dinner was eaten, I trow, after such a tragic death of a midshipman!

But, who was Philip Spencer? A native of Canandaigua, N. Y. High born and high bred; son of an eminent lawyer, John C. Spencer, and grandson of Chief Justice Ambrose Spencer, of New York; his mother, a woman of quality and high position in society. Thus summarily cut off, for only meditating mutiny and piracy! No avert act—only imaginary mutiny and piracy! Who ever heard of such an arbitrary tragedy? Had he assaulted the Captain with a sword,

pistol, or cutlass; had he committed any flagrant act of insubordination, it might have been a lawful proceeding. No! Arrested on the 25th, and tried and executed on the 26th of November.

*When the sad tidings reached Washington, Mrs. Spencer had sent out her cards for a Secretary's levee, in which she could figure with womanly grace. She recalled her invitations and retired to her chamber of mourning, as a mother for her youngest born son.

Philip when a mere child, eight or ten years old, attended the Primary Department of Canandaigua Academy. A little roughtish fellow, he found that he could cross his eyes, in sport; partly by this practice, and partly by inheritance, (for his father's eyes were so), they got set in a sort of a twist, or twinkle, of his sight.

At twelve years old, when my recollections and intimacy as his teacher began, he was rather a pretty boy in a class of three in Latin, namely, Philip Spencer at the head of the seat; Walter S. Hubbell next, and Charles Pierson at the other end of the bench. Philip was the ruling spirit, getting others into sport, and escaping detection himself. Once he displayed a manly character when Walter was called to the teacher's desk, and things looked like a chastisement of Walter for tittering all the while, he rose and said, "Don't punish Walter, for I made him do it. "Well," said the teacher, "I forgive you both, this time."

But Philip was not a favorite of the schoolboys. Once they set upon him with so much violence, that Mrs. Spencer kept him out of school several days, and wrote the note on page 86, Vol. 2, of the ANNALS, (see July number, 1883, Art. Schools and Scholars), that his teacher should interpose with his schoolmates, and cause them to desist from their talks and taunts, as Philip was not at fault in that "little matter" to which Mrs. Spencer, ("E. M. S.") alludes. Philip was shrewd enough, while under the writer's care in school, for two years, to escape any serious correction. They were the twelfth and thirteenth years of his short life.

*No apology is needed by the writer of this sketch of a pupil, as Philip Spencer has become a character in written history.

He was not fond of his Latin *Viri Romae*, or Virgil. His father, a trustee, once visited the school and complained of the author of *Viri Romae*, to the discouragement of both the teacher and the class, saying it was not classic Latin. The fact was, however, that he supposed it modern composition; whereas, almost every word of the book was taken from the "History of the Men of Rome," written by Tacitus, one of the purest ancient Latin writers.

Of Greek he was fond, and was taught it, like a living, vernacular tongue, both to spell, read and construe, with and without book open; the way all languages, dead or living, it should be noted for the benefit of teachers of both modern and ancient tongues, should always be taught, just as an infant is taught to speak and spell his mother tongue. The too common method of teaching languages disgusts and wearies the learner, using only the eyes, when the voice and memory, as well as book, should make the learners as familiar with Greek characters and words, as with his A B C's. In this way the study of the ancient languages becomes both a delight and a profit, all one's life, by the help of memory. The famous statesman, Daniel Webster, though not the most thorough linguist in his class at Dartmouth, his classmate, Merrill, (Thomas H. Merrill, D.D., of Middleburg, Vermont), as a long time resident, at graduation in the same New Hampshire College, of his native State, had the Latin Salutatory over Webster, while the latter had only an English oration. Webster was a better *Belles Lettres* scholar, always reading English books, so much so that when his father set him to mowing, during his college vacation, young Webster complained that the scythe did not hang right, till his father weary of hanging it over the third time, said, "Hang it to suit yourself;" when he hung it on a tree, and went to reading his book. His father never attempted to get any work out of Daniel after that. But to return to Spencer. He could spell Greek as well as English, and even better. And so Spencer registered his comrades, and his chosen portion of the crew of the brig, "Somers," in Greek. Cromwell, an old sailor, and it was reported at the time, that he had

been on a piratical vessel; and "Small," likewise, in Greek characters.

It so happened, that Spencer's special friend, Lieutenant Gansevoort, understood Greek, and also Rogers, among the officers of the Brig. This was one clue to the detection of Spencer as the master mind in the attempted mutiny and piracy.

From his preparatory course at Canandaigua, he went to Geneva, where the writer saw his pupil the last time, in 1838. He expressed much interest in his late classical teacher, and wished him attached to the college faculty. Here he committed many lawless deeds for obtaining money. He went into a bookstore and examined a case of surgical instruments and had them laid aside, when he should call again with the cash. But, watching when the clerk was in, he said to him, I will take those instruments which I purchased. He went out and sold them to a student of the Medical Department for what he could get. At another time he went to the room of a religious student and pretended to be very serious. But, he said: "I cannot become a Christian until I pay a debt of five dollars which I owe." The pious student was deceived and gave Spencer the money, when with a well known college call he gathered his comrades, went down town and had a drinking bout. And such was his conduct, that he was privately dismissed. He then went to Union College, bequeathing to Geneva College Society, the "Pirate's Own Book," in which was the story of Captain Kidd and other notorious pirates, down to Gibbs, executed at New York City, who owned that he had butchered more than one hundred men, women and children, until, as he said, "I could kill a person with as little conscience as I would cleave down a bullock. I did have my feelings touched once, when a little daughter, fifteen years old knelt before me and begged for life, for the sake of her widowed mother! But I cleaved off her head and threw her over the gunwhale of the vessel into the sea!"

Such horrid stories young Spencer had steeped his imagination with, till it turned his head. He needed the "Pirate's Own Book" no more, and so he left it behind for others.

At Union College, he formed a new secret society, which was against the rules of the College, as forsooth there were not enough societies already.

Next, he was heard from on board of a man-of-war. He wrote his father: "I have given you a good deal of trouble for a long time, but I shall give you no more trouble for some time." His father, then Secretary of War, stepped over to the Secretary of the U. S. Navy, and had Philip appointed as Midshipman on the brig "Somers," under Captain Mackenzie. He was on a return voyage, within three day's sail of Havana, in the Isle of Cuba, when the tragedy of death came.

Spencer had registered his chosen men of the crew, to the number of about sixty, by name in Greek. His muster-roll was discovered in a razor-box, with several wraps of paper around it, previously kept in the back of his cravat. Wales, the Steward, betrayed him, and repeated his wish to roll the Captain overboard. Cromwell and Small, old sailors, and possibly once on piratical vessels, were in the scheme. There was a sudden naval court-martial, under Lieutenant Gansevoort, after the Captain ordered the arresting and ironing of Spencer, Cromwell and Small—the only persons that could navigate the vessel, save the officers not in the conspiracy. The verdict was death by hanging of all three at the yard-arm of the vessel. They were informed of their sentence, one by one. "Spencer," said the Captain, "you are to die by hanging in an hour." "Are you not too fast, Captain," he replied. "No! *You must die in one hour!*" "Then bring me the Bible and prayer-book. Oh! it will kill my poor mother." He thus spent his last hour of life, as he was educated an Episcopalian, with his prayer-book. What a lesson! He said to Captain Mackenzie: "I am a believer! Do you think any repentance, at this late hour, can be accepted?" The Captain instanced the thief on the cross. He kneeled and read the prayer-book. Again he asked the Captain if his repentance could be accepted, the time being so short, and he not knowing that he was really changed? The Captain referred Spencer to the mercy of the Almighty, who

could regard all the necessities of his case. "Tell my friends," said Spencer, "that I die wishing them every blessing and all happiness. *I deserve death for this and many other crimes. There are few crimes that I have not committed.* I feel sincerely penitent. I have wronged many persons. This will kill my poor mother. I fear this may injure my father. My only fear of death is that my repentance may come too late! I beg your forgiveness, Captain, for what I meditated against you." Mackenzie gave him his hand, and assured Spencer of his sincere forgiveness. He declared Cromwell was *innocent*, and begged Small to forgive him for drawing him into this deadly trouble. "No! Mr. Spencer, I can't forgive you!" The Captain interposing, Small gave his hand to Spencer's outstretched hand, and said: "I do forgive you, and may Almighty God also forgive you."

Spencer, on the way to the yard-arm, asked to see Mr. Wales, and said, "Mr. Wales, I earnestly hope you will forgive me for tampering with your fidelity." "I do forgive you, from the bottom of my heart, and I hope that God also will forgive you." And each in turn said, "Farewell!" Mr. Wales melted to tears.

Spencer called for Lieutenant Gansevoort, and asked that he would bear witness to his friends, that he died a brave man. He asked the Captain's permission to give the order himself to fire the signal-gun. It was granted. But, after waiting a while, Spencer sent word that he could not. Mackenzie fired it; and with his face covered with a black handkerchief, by his request, that was found in his own locker, he and the other two were drawn up by their fellow conspirators; and, then the crew were piped down to dinner!

After hanging an hour, the two, Cromwell and Small, were put in shotted sacks and cast into the deep sea. Spencer was placed in the chest of Lieutenant Gansevoort, given freely as to a dead friend, which, filled with cannon-shot, sank with Spencer's remains into the deep sea, there to rest, till the earth and the sea shall give up their dead—till "there shall be no more sea!" May be, at the "first resurrection!" Who knows? God's mercifulness only knoweth! *In pace*

quiescat! What a sudden exit! What a warning to evil thinkers, for evil is to him that evil thinks. "As a man thinketh, so he is!" A youth of only nineteen years! The pride of parents, brothers and sisters—cut down in a day, ere it's noon!

No apology for this memorial sketch of a pupil is needed, if it shall meet the eye of any survivor, since, in the calm, distant review of this dreadful tragedy, his old classic Instructor can only say, Spencer should have been kept in irons, landed at Havana, and sent home for trial. He was too young to hang at the yard-arm—could easily have been kept, with sword, cutlass and pistol in hand, and in double irons, during three day's sail. Mackenzie was a coward! And, the proof is, that our government never put him in command of any war vessel after this awful assumption of power to hang, although investigation by Commodores and by forty days' court-marshal. I agree with J. Fenmore Cooper, who reviewed the case, Mackenzie was to be condemned and cashiered for cowardice.

But the Captain, and the condemned would-be mutineers and pirates, have gone, long ago, to the righteous bar of the Almighty God, who will do right. Alas! my young pupil; I have done what I could for thy memory.

Reflections, as well as recollections, arise upon this tragic end of life of my pupil.

1. Beware of wine and strong drink. The father of this youth had a wine cellar. And Philip, his youngest son, as well as his older brothers, were wont to drink it with the family. Besides, the older brothers, when they wished to have a drinking carousal with their boon companions, employed Philip to get a bottle from the cellar. And Mrs. Spencer, it is reported, would so change the bottles that Mr. Spencer could not, or would not be likely to detect it. Thus the indulgence of the mother, because the father was strict or severe, would hide the fault. In this way Philip, when a little boy, contracted a relish for strong drink, which hastened his ruin.

2. Beware of bad books. It was the "Pirate's Own

Book," which filled young Spencer's imagination with the glory of piracy; liquor, stolen from the wardroom of the steward; wine and brandy that overcame him; so the account of him on ship and shore goes. This bad book even got into the district school libraries of New York State, and had to be excluded by authority of the New York State Superintendent of Instruction, as an entirely unfit volume for the young.

Note the excessive prevalence of the imagination inflamed with strong drink in Philip Spencer. This led him to meditate mutiny and piracy on the ship "John Adams" and the "Potomac," before his final scheme on the brig "Somers." It became a perfect mania under the galling tyranny of a cowardly commander, Mackenzie, entirely unfitted to govern a ship load of naval cadets on a sort of trial voyage. Philip, when a boy, was noted for a brilliant imagination. This was excited still more by reading again and again the "Pirate's Own Book." That book destroyed him. Teachers and parents should check this taste for exciting scenes, and repress excessive imaginations.

3. The dying confessions of Philip Spencer, as recorded in this brief memoir by his teacher, must be taken with many grains of allowance, since they are from Mackenzie and Lieut. Gansevoort's report of the last hour of life, wrung from him by the imminent prospect of ignominious death. Much that was said by the "dying youth of nineteen" may and must have been spoken with some hope of being spared hanging. This was the cause of his saying that Cromwell was innocent, which staggered Mackenzie for awhile, till the cowardly Gansevoort, his Lieutenant, came to his aid and urged him on. The only compunctious feeling manifested in this most tragic scene was, after his friend Philip was dead, giving him his own (Gansevoort's) sea chest for a coffin. It would seem that those three comrades were tried and condemned in one half day, the 26th of November, A. D. 1842; and then all hands piped down to dinner—not much eating that meal—would, as long as life lasts, float before their mind's eye!

Should this brief sketch by a friend of the murdered youth

—judicially murdered, I must say—pass under the eye of any relatives of the parties to this tragedy, they will pardon the warmth and zeal of an old man still shocked by the recollection of so sad a sacrifice of human life! *Quiescant omnes in pace!*

MRS. DR. DUNLAP INSTANTLY KILLED

BY HER HORSE BACKING AT THE TOWNSEND STREET CROSSING AND AN EXPRESS TRAIN RUNNING DOWN HER SLEIGH.

A terrible casualty occurred this afternoon on the West Shore railroad, at the Townsend street crossing, in the Fourth Ward, just east of the Unitarian Church, by which Mrs. Dr. Joseph P. Dunlap, was instantly killed. The particulars of the occurrence are as follows:—

Mrs. Dunlap left home on Fayette Park, soon after two o'clock, in her sleigh, to go to a meeting of the Fireside Traveler's Club at Mrs. A. C. Chase's, 80 James street. In crossing the West Shore railroad track at Townsend street, the horse balked, and the Buffalo express train on the West Shore, coming from the east, at 2:34 p. m., ran into the sleigh, crushing it, and throwing Mrs. Dunlap on to the track, and the locomotive and train passed over her, crushing her head and instantly killing her. Her left arm was crushed from the elbow to the shoulder. There appear to be no other injuries to her person. John West, the driver of the horse, was thrown to one side of the track, and his skull was lacerated and his right leg broken. The horse broke loose and escaped unhurt.

Mrs. Dunlap was the wife of Dr. Joseph P. Dunlap, one of our oldest citizens and best known physicians. She was 57 years of age, and had been a resident of this city for upwards of thirty-five years. She came here from Boston as a teacher. She was one of the most accomplished and winsome ladies in the society of Syracuse, an active promoter of good works, and always engaged in benevolent and charitable enterprises.

She had two sons, Dr. Herbert W. Dunlap, who is his father's partner; and a younger son, Irving H., who recently went to Kansas to engage in cattle raising.

The intelligence of this terrible occurrence rapidly spread throughout the community, and created a very profound impression. The death of no other lady in this city could be more deeply mourned, and the universal sympathy will be extended to the sorely bereaved family.—*Syracuse Daily Journal, Monday, Jan. 7, 1884.*

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